E. Care of the Skin

515 The care the Hottentots take of their skin cannot be judged exclusively by our standards of cleanliness, principally because water is so valuable in that land.

1. Cleanliness

[207] During the hot season of the year, when there are great accumulations of water, as in the area of the Fish River, the Hottentot bathes. It is even said that he swims excellently. (66) But he shuns

66. Th. Hahn, Die Nama-Hottentotten. Ein Beitrag zur südafrikanischen Ethnographie (Globus, Bd. XII, 1867).

wash water as a daily method of keeping clean.

On the other hand, fresh ox dung and cow dung take the place of water, brush, and soap, and the dry air substitutes for a towel. However extraordinary this may seem at the first glance, such a way of washing is effective. The moisture in the manure suffices to loosen the sweat that has dried on the skin, the fine plant fibers scour ever more effectively, the drier they become in the course of the rubbing and finally the flat hand brushes off the last bit as a light dust from the part of the body that has been cleaned and at the same time pleasantly rubbed.

2. Massage

302 237 In order to give their skin the necessary suppleness, the Hottentots smear themselves with fat (ǂkoːaus(e)n or soǀbos(e)n). They smear at least the face, the skin of the head, the hands and arms, but best of all, they like to smear their whole body. This is especially true of the women.

302 415 237 The containers for fat, *ǂkxĩ·nas or *!gõ//nãːs, which are found in every hut where the inhabitants have pride in their appearance, are cut out of an oxhorn and the two openings are closed with cowhide, the bottom being firmly attached, the top moveable. The fat from

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//guru·s, shaken into a flat, wooden dish, tsari·s, and purified of the coarser elements by winnowing.

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The powder thus obtained is put in a tortoise-shell box, !ũ·ros, which is the indispensable toilet article of every woman and grown girl. The front opening of a tortoise shell is enlarged by cutting out a piece of the belly shield, the back opening is closed up with the blackened rosin of the same plant from which they make beads. [829] [Picture. Buchu boxes. 2/3 natural size.] Sometimes the dried skin and the retracted hind legs of the animal make enough of a closure. Sometimes the back closure is a hardened pulp made from the freshly crushed saliva gland of a cow instead of with rosin. A piece of soft jackal's skin serves as the front closure and as a powder container at the same time. A leather hand strap is pulled through a hole in the belly shell.

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The men rub only their armpits and neck with buchu but the women rub their whole body except their face. [210] With it they wipe off menstrual secretions and sweat from the skin and I was not able to check the account of one Hottentot that the women also sprinkle the vulva and vagina with buchu in order to win back maidenly charms by the contracting effect of the powder. [515] [841] [832]

Sometimes, because of the pleasant odor, the women incense themselves (/is(e)n) with buchu by placing the powder on hot stones and letting the smoke penetrate their clothes. Buchu is sprinkled on the skin swaddling clothes of babies and on the shrouds of the dead, and on graves. [854] [764]

To make the color of their skins more beautiful, women and girls paint (/ho/bo) their faces. The powder of a piece of clay called !naub, that is colored red by iron oxide is mixed into raw fat that has been made soft by chewing, and the salve is rubbed on the face with a finger. When the stone is lacking, iron rust is used as a substitute. The effect is that of an even brownish-red covering of the face, which even in our eyes, increases the charm of a pretty young face when it is well shaded in. [386]

A remarkable beauty product is a dark brown sticky mass, which is at times found on the surface of rocks in layers as thick as one's finger and is called "stone sweat," */u·i aos·(e)ni (cf. Analysis in the Appendix). Little pieces are rubbed on a rock with water as though they were India ink and rubbed over the greased face. The smeary spotty distribution of this make-up is ugly. [386]

family happiness, is celebrated accordingly. The girl is separated from 881
the other inhabitants of the hut by a mat wall. She puts on her jewels, [582]
relatives and friends bring her arm rings and put chains of beads around
her neck. Some of them are kept as presents. The parents slaughter and
serve honey beer to the guests.

[296] Before the Hottentots adopted European clothing the girl ex-
changed her girl's apron for that of an adult; this custom has been aban-
doned. But another custom has still been maintained here and there where
it could be concealed from the watchfulness of the mission. Males from 881
the smallest child to the aging man (old men are excused) have their scrota 751
rubbed with buchu power as a preventative for venereal disease by the girl
menstruating for the first time. The practice of this custom is called
*/na·ra‡kxa/ra·. (‡kxa/ra·b = the testicles. */na·ra is the gentle strok-
of the cow's udder, the calf of which is dead. It is supposed to have the
effect of persuading the cow to give milk. The scrotum is rubbed just as
gently with powder.)

When the first menstruation has ended, the girl is washed by a woman 881
from head to foot with wet cow manure (sheep manure is better) which 515
has been stirred to a thick porridge with a little milk. (cf. Care of the
Body, p. 207). This stuff is smeared on the body in the usual way and
rubbed in. It dries quickly on the warm skin and at the completion of
the cleansing falls off of its own accord.

Thus cleaned, the girl comes out of the separate room of the hut. 881
This coming forth of the girl, *//a/'m‡ui (//a/'m is the special term for 582
the above-described method of cleansing with manure. ‡u·i = to go out)
is the visible sign to all the inhabitants that the girl has reached marriagea-
ble age. Up to the time of the first menstrual period the girl is con-
sidered a child, /gõ·as. But from that time until she is married she is
called oasses (not oa‡ais (57)).

57. J. G. Kroenlein, Wortschatz der Khoi-
Khoin, Berlin, 1889.

The vanity of the girls is often employed in furthering the develop- 832
ment of their charms. The areola of the nipple is hard at the beginning 827
of puberty. A slightly stringy liquid can be squeezed out of the nipple
with sufficient pressure. When the breasts are just beginning to develop,
and the area around the nipples becomes firm, the girls squeeze out this
liquid assiduously to further development of the breasts. The liquid that
can be pressed out of the mammary glands at the time of the beginning
of puberty is called *//gu·rurubeb.

2: Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
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and other odds and ends are also worn as finery or as charms. But formerly armlets of ivory and copper were found among the men, while the women wore iron and copper rings and armlets, as well as necklaces of ostrich eggshell beads, teeth, or shells. Frequently also they sewed strips of raw hide round their legs in the form of rings, which, when dry, rattled against each other and made a noise when they moved. Copper trinkets and rings were worn in the ears by people of both sexes, or were attached freely to the knots of their hair. All these have now given place to glass beads, glass or wire bangles, and similar objects obtained from European traders.

Washing in water was rarely met with, and was certainly by no means customary. The toilet was performed with moist cow-dung rubbed plentifully all over the body, allowed to dry slightly, and then rolled off in lumps with the palm of the hand. To give the skin suppleness it was also generally rubbed with fat, kept in small receptacles of horn covered with leather and often carried about on the person. The women especially would smear the whole body with it, the men at least the face, scalp, hands, and arms. Both men and women also freely used *buchu*; the men powdered mainly the neck and the armpits, the women the whole body. The powder was kept in small tortoise-shell boxes, made by closing with resin the openings at the back of the shell and at the sides, so that a vessel remained with only one opening, that for the head. In Kolb's time the women would on festive occasions paint red spots on the forehead, cheek, and chin; and even to-day among the Naman the girls on such occasions still paint various patterns on their faces with a mixture of fat and the powder ground from a soft red stone such as haematite. There was no special style of dressing the hair, although occasionally part of the scalp was shaved clean and the remaining knots decorated with all sorts of small trinkets.

Bodily Mutilations

Bushmen

Various forms of bodily mutilation are practised by the Bushmen. Perhaps the best known of these is the removal of a finger joint, as a rule that of one of the little fingers. The older writers on the Southern Bushmen frequently mention it as occurring in some men and women, as well as in children, but it is not universally found.[1] The

[1] E.g. Barrow, *Travels in S. Africa*, vol. i, 289; Arbousset, *Voyage d'Exploration au ... Cap de Bonne-Espérance*, 493; Bleek and Lloyd, *Bushman Folklore*, 329; G. Thompson, *Travels ... in S. Africa*, i, 43.

2: Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
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Nama
Cape Hottentots

not touch cold water. It is only certain women who are said to be */khai /na*, forbidden or dangerous, who cannot do these things; and a sure way of finding out is to take a woman along the seashore when first she menstruates. The sea, as the greatest accumulation of cold water, is very dangerous for people in an unstable condition. If the woman is */khai /na*, it will rush in towards her, and she will have to take great care not to be drawn in. The woman to whom this happens must not dare to do anything during her period, for she would be a danger to all who touched her food or the milk she had milked.[1]

A similar discrimination is implied in Vedder's account of the girls' puberty rites among the inland Naman. During her seclusion, he says, the girl is given fresh cow's milk to drink. This milk must come from a cow that has its first calf. If the cow does not die during the days of the menstruation, or if it does not get ill, the girl is harmless. But if it should die, this is proof that the girl possesses special powers, and she dare not again drink milk from the herd during her period, lest she imperil the animals. The menstrual blood of such a girl, he adds, is looked upon as an effective poison, which, when dry, is rubbed from her clothes and mixed with the food of enemies in order to kill them. The blood of a harmless girl, on the other hand, is used as medicine for sexual diseases amongst men.[2]

Of the girls' puberty rites among the other Hottentot peoples we have no adequate description. That they existed, however, is shown by Barrow's statement that although by his time many of the ancient usages of the Cape and Eastern Hottentots had ceased to exist, "one custom still remained, which seemed to be pretty generally observed: this was that of shaving the heads of young girls as soon as the first symptoms of maturity began to appear; at the same time, all the ornaments worn on the neck, legs, and arms are removed, and the body for once in their life clean washed and scoured; and during the continuance of the periodical symptoms, they are restricted to a milk diet, and not suffered to mix in the company of men."[3]

Kolb, writing nearly a century earlier of the Cape Hottentots, makes no mention at all of any special usages connected with a girl's first period, but refers several times to the fact that menstruating women were to avoid the company of men. A husband, for example, might not have sexual intercourse with his wife during her periods, or even eat with her, otherwise he would become unclean and have to purify himself by slaughtering an ox for an *andersmachen* in which

[1] Ibid., 525. [2] "The Nama," 136. [3] *Travels in S. Africa*, 2nd ed., i, 114.

by their names. In their communications they have titles of honour in accordance with the degree of relationship. 593 576

It might be mentioned here that the missionaries have succeeded in introducing family names which were unknown to the Nama before. These family names are derived from the Nama language, the heathen names of the grandfathers and great-grandfathers being changed into the family names of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Only the Orlam tribes have family names which were given to them by their masters in the Cape, *e.g.*, Teapot, Vlermuis, Afrikaner, etc., etc. 551 [619]

8. Their old national dress is very seldom worn. It consisted of home-dressed skins which were worn as aprons in front and at the back with a leather belt; and a large skin which served as a cloak and blanket and, twisted over the right shoulder and underneath the left arm, served as a bag for the gatherer of veld-kos. 291

At present both men and women go clad in European clothes. Coloured designs are preferred. While the Herero women have clung to the mode of dress introduced by the wives of missionaries 60 years ago, the Nama has not adopted any permanent national dress for the women and girls. [177]

9. Instead of the old anointing of the body with fat, they have resorted to cleaning themselves with water and soap, although everywhere Nama, who regard the application of soap and water as detrimental to health, are still to be found. 302 [515]

The habit of the women to powder their bodies with "buchu" which they make for themselves by powdering a great variety of shrubs and roots, is still in vogue to-day, and there are still women who hideously paint their faces with a blackish red salve during the period of menstruation, or early pregnancy and on cold winter days. [84] 843

10. The Nama is not miserly or avaricious. What he has in the form of food or other means of enjoyment he shares in the first place with his family and also with strangers. 574

To smoke alone or to eat a piece of bread which has been obtained accidentally is regarded as very unbecoming. Servants who labour for Europeans and receive their food there are wont to carry part of a special tit-bit home to share it with their people, unless the master, not knowing the Nama custom, should demand that all be eaten before his eyes so that his servants, for whom it is intended, may have the benefit of it and not strangers. [576]

11. The Nama is decidedly inclined to sociability. It is his wont to squat or sit on a low chair near the fireside at night and to tell to the last details and discuss the news of the day; nor do they separate till very late in the night. The Christians like sitting round the fire at night untiringly singing their songs and hymns. They still take great pleasure in the Reed-dance on bright moonlight nights. On 571 535 [521]

10: Grevenbroek F-5 (ca. 1694) 1933
FX13 Hottentot FX13
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South Nguni FX17

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mysteries! Behold the strenuous champions of Divine Truth! On the last day at the last judgment they shall be burned in the middle ditch of the amphitheatre by these barbarians. "This is the final spark of the woe to come."

They are beyond belief patient of heat, cold, fasting, and every kind of toil, but utterly impatient of injury, and prone to vengeance. Wherefore if a louse or a gnat sting them they put it into their mouth for no other reason than that by the law of retaliation they may chop, grind, and crush it with their teeth, and spit it out. Nothing pleases them more, they openly boast, than to return evil for evil, nor can they easily be at rest till they have satisfied their minds by the torture of their enemies. They are offensive to look at, savage in their dress, wild in their mode of life, but warlike and unaccustomed to slavery. They are as swift as the wind, often outstripping horses in fleetness of foot and Cretans in swimming.

H 142 [515]

In whiteness of soul they are superior to many of our countrymen, and in whiteness of body they are equal to some, and, in my judgment, would perhaps be so to all, if they cared for cleanliness. But as things are, what with fat and the scorching heat of the sun and the sharp pigment they put on their faces, they have grown dark and are of a swarthy brown colour. They have lively bright eyes, and the whites of their eyes and their teeth are fairer than snow. The pupils of the eyes are of a shade between brown and yellow. They have small feet and feminine hands; they are lightly built, and almost all snub-nosed. Those who live near our Cape are of middle height; but the inhabitants of the remote parts of this region are shaggy fellows, with taller and sturdier frames, and with frizzy hair.[2] Among them has been seen a king, Longurio, twelve foot high, with hair all over his body thicker than a water spaniel's.[3] To these latter the shortness of our countrymen is a matter of contempt. Sometimes they are bald in front; sometimes they wear beard and moustache and shave their heads. The women have large breasts. With the rarest exceptions I never saw one among them that was marked from birth, fat, hunch-backed, squinting, or that had varicose veins, a swollen paunch, flat feet or spindle-shanks, or one that went bow-legged or knock-kneed or had misshapen limbs of any kind, nor did I ever see one blind of an eye nor halt in his speech, nor

S [42]

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